

Religious-Related Activities and Practices

The board recognizes that views and opinions regarding the relationship of the schools and religion are diverse. While community opinions are important in shaping policy, the board must give primary credence to the United States and Washington State constitutions, state law and the decisions made by the respective courts when establishing guidelines for making decisions regarding religious-related activities and practices. The board further accepts the declaration of the State Board of Education that “all students . . . possess the constitutional right to the free exercise of religion and to have their schools free from sectarian control or influence.” To this end, the board establishes the following guidelines to preserve the constitutional rights of all students:

- A. Instruction about religious matters and/or using religious materials will be conducted in an objective, neutral, non-devotional manner and will serve a secular educational purpose. History, sociology, literature, the arts and other disciplines taught in school may have a religious dimension. Study of these disciplines, including the religious dimension, will give neither preferential nor disparaging treatment to any single religion or to religion in general and must not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes.

Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion will seek the same neutrality, objectivity and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum. In addition, materials and activities should be sensitive to America's pluralistic society and should educate rather than indoctrinate. Instructional activities should meet the three-part test established and used by the U.S. Supreme Court to determine constitutionality: (1) the activity must have a secular purpose; (2) the activity's principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) the activity must not excessively involve the school in religion. This constitutional restriction does not preclude a student from expressing his/her views relative to belief or non-belief about a religious-related issue in compositions, reports, music, art, debate and classroom discussion, when consistent with the assignment.

All religious-related instructional materials and/or activities must relate to secular student learning goals or standards.

Staff will avoid assigning work that emphasizes the religious aspects of a holiday. Individual students should be allowed, at their own direction, to use religious personages, events or symbols as a vehicle for artistic expression, if consistent with the assignment. State law prohibits staff from requiring that students reveal, analyze or critique their religious beliefs, from grading academic work on its religious expression if any, from censoring or imposing consequences on students who engage in religious expression in accordance with the law, or from imposing the religious beliefs of the staff member on students.

Factual and objective teaching about religion and the impact of religion and religious-based ideas and ideals will not equate religion and morality by suggesting that religious convictions or sanctions are the only basis of moral principles and behavior.

- B. A student may decline to participate in a school activity that is contrary to his/her religious convictions.
- C. If noncurriculum-related student groups are permitted to meet on school premises immediately before or after school hours, students will be permitted to meet to discuss religious, political, philosophical or other issues provided such group meetings are

student-initiated and student-managed in compliance with Board Policy 2153, Non-curriculum Related Student Groups.

- D. Religious groups may rent school facilities under the policy providing for facilities rental. Activities of such groups will be clearly separated from school sponsored activities so that the school district does not support or appear to support the establishment of religion.
- E. A student may distribute religious literature under the same conditions that other literature may be distributed on the campus provided that such distribution does not intrude on the operation of the school.
- F. Material and/or announcements promoting religion may not be distributed by non-students or on behalf of groups or individuals who are not students.
- G. Religious services, programs or assemblies will not be conducted in school facilities during school hours or in connection with any school sponsored or school related activity. Speakers and/or programs that convey a religious or devotional message are prohibited. This restriction does not preclude the presentation of choral or musical assemblies which may use religious music or literature as a part of the program or assembly.
- H. Musical, artistic and dramatic presentations which have a religious theme may be included in course work and programs on the basis of their particular artistic and educational value or traditional secular usage. They will be presented in a neutral, non-devotional manner, be related to the objective of the instructional program, and be accompanied by comparable artistic works of a nonreligious nature.

Since a variety of activities is included as part of a holiday theme, care must be exercised to focus on the historical and secular aspects of the holiday rather than its devotional meanings. Music programs will not use the religious aspect of a holiday as the underlying message or theme. Pageants, plays and other dramatic activities will not be used to convey religious messages. Religious symbols such as nativity scenes, if used, will be displayed in conjunction with a variety of secular holiday symbols so that the total presentation emphasizes the cultural rather than religious significance of the holiday.

- I. A student, upon the request of a parent, may be excused (as an excused absence) to participate in religious instruction for a portion of a school day provided the activity is not conducted on school property. (Credit will not be granted for such instruction.)
- J. Upon receipt of a parent(s) request, a student will be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.
- K. Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process.
- L. As a matter of individual liberty, a student may of his/her own volition engage in private, non-disruptive prayer at any time not in conflict with learning activities. School staff will neither encourage, nor discourage a student from engaging in non-disruptive oral or silent prayer or any other form of devotional activity.
- M. Commencement exercises will be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions.
- N. There will be no school sponsorship of baccalaureate services. Interested parents and students may plan and organize baccalaureate exercises provided that the service is not promoted through the school and staff, and student participation is voluntary.

Students, parents and staff who are aggrieved by practices or activities conducted in the school or district may register their concern with the building principal or district superintendent.

Cross References:	Board Policy 2153	Noncurriculum-related Student Groups
	Board Policy 3122	Excused and Unexcused Absences
	Board Policy 3220	Freedom of Expression
	Board Policy 3223	Freedom of Assembly
	Board Policy 3224	Student Dress
	Board Policy 4220	Complaints Concerning Staff or Program
	Board Policy 4237	Contests, Advertising and Promotions
	Board Policy 4235	Public Performances
Legal References:	Board Policy 4260	Use of School Facilities
	U.S. Constitution	First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment
	Wash. Constitution	Art. I, § 11
	Wash. Constitution	Art. 9, Sec. 4 and Art. 26
	RCW 28A.600.025	Students' rights of religious expression — Duty of superintendent of public instruction to inform school districts
	WAC 392-400-227	School district rules defining students' religious rights

Adoption Date: 2/5/2013
Bellevue School District
Revised:

Freedom of Expression

The free expression of student opinion is an important part of education in a democratic society. Students' verbal and written expression of opinion on school premises is to be encouraged so long as it does not substantially disrupt the operation of the school. Students are expressly prohibited from the use of vulgar and/or offensive terms in classroom or assembly settings.

The superintendent will develop guidelines assuring that students are able to enjoy free expression of opinion while maintaining orderly conduct of the school.

Student Publications

Student publications produced as part of the school's curriculum or with the support of the associated student body fund are intended to serve both as vehicles for instruction and student communication. They are operated and substantively financed by the district. Material appearing in such publications should reflect all areas of student interest, including topics about which there may be controversy and dissent. Controversial issues may be presented provided that they are treated in depth and represent a variety of viewpoints. Such materials may not: be libelous, obscene or profane; cause a substantial disruption of the school; invade the privacy of others; demean any race, religion, sex, or ethnic group; advocate the violation of the law; or advertise tobacco products, liquor, illicit drugs, or drug paraphernalia.

The superintendent will develop guidelines to implement these standards and will establish procedures for the prompt review of any materials which appear not to comply with the standards.

Distribution of Materials

Publications or other material written by students may be distributed on school premises in accordance with procedures developed by the superintendent. Such procedures may impose limits on the time, place, and manner of distribution including prior authorization for the posting of such material on school property.

Students responsible for the distribution of material which leads to a substantial disruption of school activity or otherwise interferes with school operations will be subject to corrective action or punishment, consistent with student discipline policies.

Cross Reference:	Board Policy 2340	Religious-related Activities and Practices
	3241	Classroom Management, Corrective Actions or Punishment
	4060	Distribution of Materials

Legal References:	WAC 392-400-215	Student rights
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Management Resources:		
	<i>Policy News</i> , August 2001	A Few Civil Liberty Reminders

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Freedom of Assembly

Individual students and student organizations may meet in school rooms or auditoriums, or at outdoor locations on school grounds, to discuss, pass resolutions and take other lawful action respecting any matter which directly or indirectly concerns or affects them, whether or not it relates to school. Such activities will not be permitted to interfere with the normal operation of the school.

Peaceful demonstrations are permissible, however they must be held in designated places where they will present no hazards to persons or property and at designated times that will not disrupt classes or other school activities.

Cross Reference: Board Policy 2153

Noncurriculum Related Student Groups

Legal References: WAC 392-400-215

Student rights

Distribution of Materials

Any outside organization wishing to distribute informational material must first submit, to the superintendent or a designee, a copy of the material and a statement of the educational value the program provides to students.

Informational materials to be distributed must also be approved by the superintendent or a designee and meet certain standards prior to distribution. The primary purpose of the standards is to prevent the exploitation of students by individuals or groups.

This district reserves the right to decline to distribute any item(s) if, in the Superintendent's or his/her designee's sole judgment and discretion, students or employees will not be well served by it. The Superintendent and his/her designee reserve the right to determine the appropriate method of distribution, as well as the right to decline to distribute the item(s) at all.

Approved parent-teacher organizations may distribute informational materials under this policy.

It is the responsibility of the superintendent, in conjunction with the building principals, to draft procedures regarding this policy, including a list of reasons for denying distribution of materials, including the criteria by which such decisions will be made.

Cross References: Board Policy 2340 Religious-Related Activities and Practices
Board Policy 3220 Freedom of Expression

Management Resources:

Policy News, April 2005 Distribution of Materials

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